

TRANSACTION No. 70

MARCH 8, 1906

THE HISTORICAL AND SCIENTIFIC  
SOCIETY OF MANITOBA

---

A GREAT CITY  
LIBRARY

---

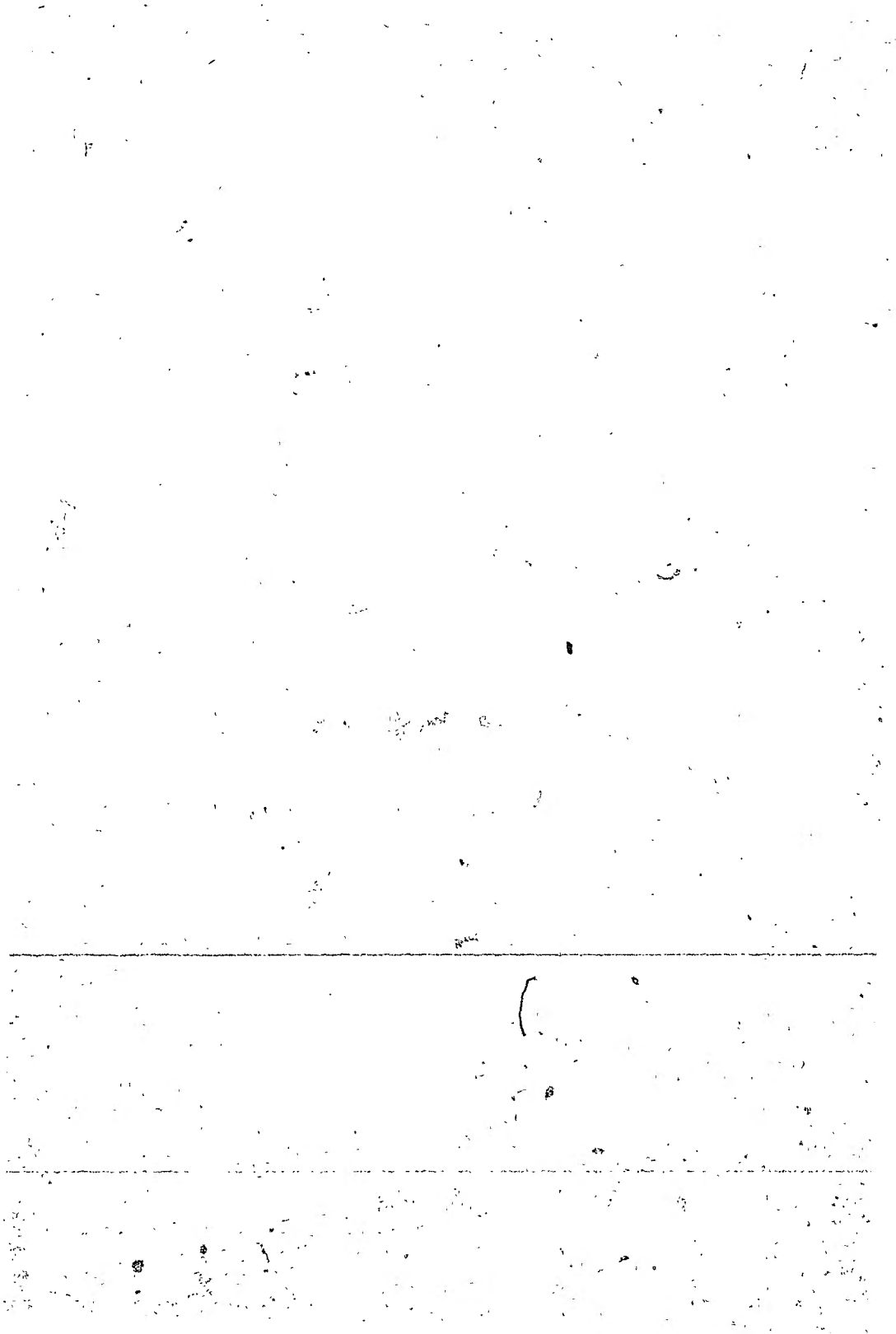
BY

GEORGE BRYCE, LL.D., F.R.S.C.

PRESIDENT OF THE SOCIETY

---

Winnipeg  
The Manitoba Free Press Company  
1906



# A GREAT CITY LIBRARY

---

The Annual Meeting of the Historical and Scientific Society of Manitoba was held March 8th in the Y.M.C.A. building, Winnipeg. Of the two papers read, one was by the President of the Society, the Rev. Dr. Bryce. His subject, "A Great City Library," is of much importance to every class of citizen. The following is the President's Address:—

A full and well-selected Public Library is as necessary to the city as the Board of Trade, the Parks Board or the Humane Society. At first sight many persons may question this. The conception some have of a Public Library is that it is a mere exchange for novel readers, a resort in which to look up the latest magazines, and perhaps a haven for those of more culture to get at the public expense the latest literary critique on the revival of the Bronte cult, or more information on the interminable dispute as to Carlyle and his domestic infelicities.

These and like purposes the Public Library no doubt does serve. But these are not the main purposes of a well provided library that takes seriously the spread of knowledge or the increase of intelligence among the people. General culture is certainly the purpose of the library, but when the city undertakes a library it should aim at providing works for consultation on the practical side of life—especially is this so in Winnipeg.

Winnipeg is more than four hundred miles from St. Paul and Minneapolis—the nearest point where a great public library may be expected to rise; it is thirteen hundred from Toronto or Ottawa, the nearest Canadian cities where a sufficient concentration of population and means is likely to provide a great library.

The isolated position of Winnipeg as the one great city of Western Canada throws the greater responsibility on it to provide books—expensive books—to supply information for our Western Provinces. Books are needed—books covering all departments of the social, educational and legislative demands of the provincial life. The city has many requirements—industrial, manufacturing, business, statistical, legal, artistic, aesthetic, athletic, intellectual and religious.

Thousands of questions are constantly rising in all these fields of thought, and books are needed to answer questions, to stimulate enquiry, to learn from the successes or failures of other cities what we may do.

If the books demanded were to be had otherwise in Winnipeg, the city certainly would not need to provide them; for books even in private hands are now regarded as in some sense public property open to appreciative readers. But the needed books are not to be found among us. The Provincial Library is chiefly legislative, with a certain number of books historical and general. The Colleges have small libraries of books—educational, scholastic and theological. The University professors are very properly clamoring for reference works in science for their use—but their library is in its infancy. All these do not and cannot supply the demands of our Western life; or provide for the well-being of our rapidly developing city and country.

It lies at the door of Winnipeg to supply the pressing want, expensive though it may be, if it is to be supplied at all.

### OUR PRESENT POSITION.

The Historical Society, incorporated in 1879, has always stood for the maintenance of a library to supply this want. Early in its history the Society raised from the citizens some \$1,600 to make the beginning of a Public Library. The library was maintained in the Society's rented rooms until 1888, when an agreement was made between the City Council and the Historical Society to carry on the library jointly in the City Hall. The library, with a small fee of \$2 a year from each reader, was carried on until 1895, when it became a Free Public Library, the City Council meeting the whole expense. The joint management so continued until 1904.

The grant, even after the establishment of the Free Library, was insignificant—\$2,000 a year, from which salaries and all charges were required to be paid.

The narrow quarters, and their unsanitary and uncleanly condition, operated much against the library.

We have in the last few days transferred some two thousand of our books—the best selection of them—to the Public Library.

We speak of the "dust of ages," but if the dust of ages accumulates in proportion to that of the eighteen years since we entered the City Hall,

then I don't wonder at the dread of antiquity that the aldermen have had, and yet there was a clause in the agreement—

"That the City Hall caretaker be responsible for the care of the Historical rooms as well as of those belonging to the Public Library."

We are pleased, however, with the greater energy and higher appreciation of books shown by the present Library Committee, in comparison with their predecessors.

The Carnegie Library, notwithstanding the ungrateful remarks made now and then by citizens as to the donor, Mr. Andrew Carnegie, was the only solution of the Library question. It has given us new hope of having a great City Library.

The quarters then—suitable and commodious—having been provided, the city is committed to making the Public Library worthy of the great metropolis of Western Canada, worthy of a University city, and worthy of the ambition of a city of nearly one hundred thousand people.

It becomes citizens interested in the higher interests of the metropolis to discuss:—What shall be put into the Carnegie building? What ideals shall prevail? What class of books shall be obtained—the merely ephemeral or the permanent?

### FICTION.

The prevalence of novel reading in our Public Libraries is one of the features of the age. It would be narrow and unwise to object to good works of fiction. The parable, the allegory, the novel, and much poetry may be the product of the imagination and represent the highest flight of human intellect. But that eighty per cent of all the books read from our public libraries is fiction is surely grotesque and unreasonable. And then the varying quality of fiction should be taken into account. The novel of our own time should not be excluded, but the plethora of poor novels is a feature of this first decade of the Twentieth Century. It is a fair question whether the ephemeral fiction should be found in our public libraries at all. For one thing, it is not possible to meet the ardent novel reader's demand. The public library usually takes in half a dozen copies of the latest novel. These novels are put on as seven day books. A break-neck dash is made by the mentally-jaded novel reader to get the new novel. Only six persons in the first week can each get one of the six copies; only twenty-four all told can obtain the said novel in the first month. In the month the craving for it is over, and only a handful of the hundreds demanding it can be supplied.

Since no public library, then, can supply the demand, it is better, since novels are cheap, that the McIntosh Library, or the 'Booklovers' Club, or the bookseller, should be patronized by those making this unhealthy demand; and that the public library should only aim at keeping those novels which have gained the place of being good literature.

## NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES.

For a well-provided newspaper and magazine room in a public library a better plea can be made than for fiction. These are read on the premises. A large portion of our city people come from or have acquaintanceships and interests in the cities or towns of the country west of us. They also are fond of glancing over the local home newspaper to learn what they are doing "away back east." No one can subscribe for all the papers which he might desire to run over for five minutes now and then. No man could take the hundred magazines, any one of which he might desire to consult, particularly if they were arranged, indexed, and cross-referenced to save his time.

But a few hundred dollars—say four or five hundred—will give 100 newspapers and 100 magazines.

That would be money well spent by the library, for hundreds of people can read them, while only half a dozen are able to seize at one time the latest novel. If this were done, the best newspapers and magazines could every year be bound and form really the only complete source for furnishing contemporary facts. These passing publications, bound and well catalogued, are most valuable for supplying the history of our own times.

## A CIRCULATING LIBRARY.

A real public library may be called the people's college. Here books should be provided to interest, educate and stimulate all classes of citizens. Though the expense of renewals is great on account of the destruction of books in the circulating library, yet it is universally conceded as necessary that books should be lent out for one or two weeks to readers to cultivate the taste for home reading. In Great Britain there is very much more home reading than we have in Winnipeg or in any part of Canada. Mudie's Circulating Library does an enormous business in sending out to the remotest corners of the British Isles all classes of books of convenient size and character.

The Toronto Public Library, eleven years after its establishment, had 35,926 volumes in its circulating library, and these covered not only magazines, but books on medical, social and other sciences; also of religious literature, the arts, language and literature, geography, novels and topography, with history, biography and poetry.

But the observable thing is that in Toronto, where the tastes and condition of the people are very much the same as those of Winnipeg, the proportion in the circulating library of fiction to all the other books was only as 1 to 7. This thoroughly supports the position we have taken that only fiction which is established as good literature should as a rule be largely used.

### THE REFERENCE LIBRARY.

But it is the Reference Library in which we are as a Society chiefly interested. Reference books are open for consultation in the reading room of the library, but may not be taken from the building. The Reference Library consists of books which are more expensive and therefore more valuable and useful; books of cumbrous size such as dictionaries and the like, which cannot be easily moved or carried; or uncommon or rare books, which even the private libraries of the well-to-do cannot secure; and yet books of a class which must at times be consulted by different classes of citizens.

The Reference Library is the notable part of every library. In Toronto Public Library, which has from the first been under the care of Mr. James Bain, he a scholarly man, who had several years' experience in a publishing house and is an authority on things Canadian—who, in short, is in every way a competent librarian—wrote a few years ago in speaking of the library and the board of twelve leading citizens who assist him:—

“From the outset the Board has watched with great interest the growth of the Reference Library as the most valuable portion of the institution under their direction, and feel a reasonable pride in the valuable collection of books which has been gathered together during the past ten years. In the department of Canadian history and exploration it is unequalled in the Dominion; while in arts, manufactures, patents, history and genealogy, and many other subjects, it occupies a high position.”

During the ten years spoken of the Toronto Reference Library increased from 8,043 volumes to 33,062—nearly as many books as the Circulating Library contained.

## OUR CONTRIBUTION.

The almost total want of reference books in our Carnegie Library demands the immediate attention and support of all who desire to see a worthy library for the city. It was this idea that led the Historical Society to make the offer of 2,000 of its best books to the Carnegie Library for the present use of all classes of our citizens. It is to be open as a Reference Library to them all.

Our Society may have seemed to some to be too insistent in having their works placed in the Carnegie Library. It will be noticed that they are precisely the class of books—books on Canadian history and exploration—which are the glory of the Toronto Library.

Among these books soon to be open to the citizens are works on early colonial history, books of early travel on Hudson Bay and the Atlantic coast; valuable works on Indian lore and customs; accounts of early fur traders, as well as most of the Canadian books which have been published in Canada in late years. There, too, is a splendid set of the Jesuit Relations of sixty-nine volumes; Bancroft's great series of the Pacific Coast of 31,000 large pages; Schoolcraft's six quarto volumes on Algonquin folk-lore; Leslie Stephens' remarkable National Biography of sixty-three volumes; Murray's large dictionary up to the letter K, which, when complete, is to have one million of new quotations. There are besides large numbers of most valuable works, including the great set from the Smithsonian institution of 120 volumes of the Geological Survey of the United States, with its splendid illustrations.

## WHAT IS NEEDED?

No doubt city finances need consideration; but if Toronto added to its Reference Library 2,500 volumes a year in its first ten years, does not Winnipeg need to do the same? Cyclopaedias and gazetteers are wanted. Questions of every sort arise, making it necessary to have full sources of information. Dictionaries are in great demand for all the twenty or thirty languages spoken in the city; and especially is every variety of dictionary wanted for the English language. Dictionaries of language, etymology, archaic and provincial words, anachronisms, Scottish words and expressions, Irish-English, Gipsy dialect, synonyms, and the like. Constant disputes are



occurring needing solution. The possession of Indian dictionaries, some of which are supplied by the Historical Society, should be kept in view, for the purposes of trade, etc. It can easily be seen that in no department can there be a more useful library provided than in the broad field of linguistics.

## THE FINE ARTS.

One of the greatest wants in the city is authoritative treatises and careful illustrations in the fine arts of painting and sculpture. We are absolutely without this means of culture in any public place. A Reference Library of expensive works, containing the pictures and the work of the greatest artists, is imperatively demanded. We are too young yet to get great pictures themselves. They are hard to obtain and beyond our resources; but we may have splendid prints of all the great pictures by the expenditure of a comparatively moderate sum. Art and literature will claim more and more devotees as our city grows.

## SCIENCE.

Social, political, medical, and general natural science are all represented in libraries of any position or standing. The problems of public utilities, of taxation, of civil government, of political organization, should be freely accessible to all our working men. This is the age of the common people. Every facility should be given for supplying the numerous voting class with materials of study and reference. Then applied science, as dealing with lighting, heating, sewerage, power, city paving, water supply, and other such problems should be well represented. Winnipeg will yet be the home of the industrial arts. Factories will increase. Every industrial question should have some authorities in the Reference Library where it may be studied.

## GEOGRAPHY, TRAVEL, ETC.

Valuable works on geography, travel and topography are out of the reach of the mass of the people. Why should they be debarred from increasing their intelligence and widening their view of things? When men and their families cannot afford to go abroad and travel, they may largely supply the lack by the well chosen and authoritative books of travel. So

with history. The failures and successes of the past, the rise of civilization, its perils, and a hundred other important matters may be studied by the provision made in the Reference Library for historical examination. Biography is but a department of this great subject, by consulting which we may gain inspiration, and by the acquaintance with great men may perhaps make our lives sublime.

### THE CANADIAN DEPARTMENT.

One word more for Canada. Canada is becoming a nation. Its writers are becoming better and better known. Even in the mother country is this so. Everything literary, or in the several departments mentioned, which is Canadian, should be an especial care to an intelligent and broad-minded librarian. The historian, the essay writer, the debater, the reporter, the teacher, the political or pulpit orator, should have the opportunity and ready access for consultation to a fully supplied and up-to-date Canadian department in the Carnegie Library on William Street.

If this should be the outcome of the efforts of the Historical and Scientific Society for the last twenty-five years, then we may feel satisfied.

